

Goddess had to compete against a number of other contenders for this, the greatest honor a man could achieve. Such a youth would have to win various contests that were similar to the tasks Eurystheus assigned to Heracles. Traditional competitions included: an archery contest in which the archer shot an arrow through a ring or a series of rings; fights with wild beasts, such as a lion, a boar, and a bull; a wrestling match with a mighty opponent; the plowing of a hill or field in one day; and the bridling of wild horses.

Apollodorus gives the most complete version of Heracles' labors in *The Library*.

THE LABORS AND DEATH OF HERACLES

Heracles was the son of Zeus and a mortal woman. The lord of Olympus wanted to be certain that Heracles earned eternal fame, but he also wanted to please Hera, who hated his children by other women. Therefore, Zeus promised Hera that Heracles would have to perform for King Eurystheus of Tiryns whatever ten labors the king commanded. Only then would Zeus make Heracles immortal.

Heracles earned his name when he was eight months old, for Hera unintentionally caused him to win great glory (*Hera + kleos*: glory). Wishing to kill him, she sent two huge snakes into his nursery. As the snakes approached his bed, Heracles gleefully extended his arms, grabbed a snake in each hand, and strangled both serpents.

Heracles continued to earn fame as he grew into manhood. He married a princess and became the father of three sons. Eurystheus, fearing that Heracles would become a threat to his power, commanded him to perform the labors. When Heracles refused to become Eurystheus' servant, Hera caused Heracles to become insane. In a fit of madness, he picked up his great bow and shot his children, thinking that they were enemies.

Upon recovering his sanity, Heracles withdrew from all society, became purified of his crime, and sought the advice of the oracle of Delphi. The oracle informed Heracles that he must obey the will of the gods by performing whatever ten labors Eurystheus commanded, and that he would then become immortal. Heracles obeyed the oracle and placed himself in the service of the king.

Eurystheus first commanded Heracles to bring him the skin of the lion of Nemea. Heracles knew that the beast could not be hurt by stone or bronze, so he would have to devise some other way to kill it. When he came upon the lion, he learned that his arrows and his huge wooden club were also useless. The lion responded to Heracles' attack by retreating into

a cave that had two exits. Heracles blocked one exit with a huge rock and entered the cave through the other opening. He wrestled with the beast until, finally, he was able to put one arm around the lion's neck, tighten his grip, and choke it to death. Heracles left the cave wearing the lion's skin as a fearsome trophy.

When Heracles returned to Tiryns dressed as the Nemean lion, Eurystheus was so frightened by the sight that he ordered Heracles to remain outside the city gates. Thereafter, Eurystheus communicated with Heracles by having one of his servants act as his messenger.

For his second labor, Eurystheus commanded Heracles to kill the Hydra of Lerna. This monster lived in a swamp and scoured the nearby countryside in search of cattle to eat. It had nine snake-like heads upon its huge body, and the middle head was immortal. First, Heracles forced the monster out of the swamp by shooting blazing arrows at it. Then he grabbed the hydra and tried to smash its heads with his club. But wherever Heracles destroyed one head, two new heads replaced it. Seeing that such schemes would only multiply his problem, Heracles ordered his nephew and traveling companion, Iolas, to put a log into a fire and create a white-hot brand.

Then Heracles cut off the hydra's mortal heads one by one. As he severed them, Iolas immediately seared and sealed the monster's raw flesh before a new set of heads could sprout. Heracles cut off the one immortal head and buried it under a huge rock by the side of the road. Finally, he sliced the Hydra's body into pieces and dipped his arrows into the monster's blood, for a wound infested with the Hydra's deadly poison was incurable. When Heracles returned to Tiryns, Eurystheus declared that this labor did not count because Iolas had helped perform it.

For his third labor, Eurystheus commanded Heracles to bring to Tiryns the swift deer with golden horns that was sacred to Artemis, goddess of the hunt. Heracles realized that if he wounded the deer, he would anger Artemis. So instead of shooting it, he pursued it for an entire year. Finally, the deer lay down, exhausted, and Heracles captured it. He enclosed it in a net, slung the net over his shoulders, and returned with it to Tiryns.

Heracles' fourth labor involved capturing the Erymanthian boar and carrying it, alive, back to Tiryns. The wild boar was extremely dangerous because of its sharp tusks, and it was incredibly fast in spite of its short legs. Heracles chased it up a mountainside into deep snow, where it could no longer run swiftly. When the beast was too exhausted to challenge Heracles with its tusks, the hero bound its feet and carried it back to Tiryns on his shoulders.

For his fifth labor, Eurystheus chose to humiliate Heracles by ordering him to clean the stables of King Augeas in one day. If the stables had ever been clean, no one remembered it, and many herds of cattle had left dung piled high. To preserve his dignity, Heracles did not mention Eurystheus' command. Instead, he approached the king and offered to clean the stables in a day in return for some cattle.

When Augeas agreed, Heracles changed the course of two nearby rivers so that they ran through the stables and washed away the dung. However, when the king learned that Heracles had been ordered to clean the stables, he would not pay him. Also, Eurystheus would not accept this labor because Heracles had performed it in return for a promise of payment.

For his sixth labor, Eurystheus commanded Heracles to chase the hordes of Stymphalian birds away from the lake of that name in Arcadia. The birds were robbing the farmers of the fruits of their orchards and were dangerous as well, for they would shoot their feathers like arrows. Athena helped Heracles by giving him a bronze rattle that made such a dreadful noise it frightened the birds away.

The seventh labor required Heracles to journey to Crete and capture the bull that Poseidon had sent to King Minos for a special sacrifice. When the king did not kill the beautiful bull as he had promised, the lord of the sea turned it into a ferocious beast. Heracles caught the bull, brought it back to Tiryns, and set it free.

For his eighth labor, Heracles had to capture the mares of King Diomedes, which ate human flesh. He found them chained to their bronze troughs, feeding upon the arms and legs of strangers. Heracles was so angered by the king's savage nature that he killed Diomedes and fed his body to his mares. Once the horses ate the flesh of the man who had trained them to enjoy eating people, Heracles could control them. He took them to Eurystheus, who set them free. The mares then climbed Mount Olympus, where wild animals killed them.

In the course of performing this labor, Heracles stopped to visit his good friend King Admetus, whose wife, Alcestis, had just died. Heracles wrestled with Death for her life and won the contest, thereby restoring Alcestis to her husband.

For his ninth labor, Eurystheus commanded Heracles to bring him the belt of the Amazon queen, Hippolyte, because his daughter wanted it. The Amazons were an aggressive tribe of female warriors, and Ares, god of war, had given Hippolyte her belt. When Heracles arrived, Hippolyte met him; once she knew why he needed it, she gave him her belt. Hera felt this was too easy, so the goddess disguised herself as an Amazon and shouted that Heracles was abducting their queen. When the warrior women attacked him, Heracles thought Hippolyte had betrayed him, so he killed her, took her belt, and returned to Tiryns.

For his tenth labor, Eurystheus commanded Heracles to bring him the beautiful red cattle of the monstrous giant Geryon, who had the form of three men joined together at the waist. Guarding the cattle was a two-headed dog named Orthus. When Orthus attacked him, Heracles clubbed the dog to death and began to herd the cattle. Geryon met Heracles by the river and tried to stop him. Heracles moved to the giant's side, raised his mighty bow, and killed Geryon by shooting one arrow through his middle.

On his way back to Tiryns with Geryon's cattle, Heracles stopped along the Tiber River and lay down to rest. A monstrous, fire-belching giant named Cacus saw the beautiful cattle and stole the best oxen. Craftily, Cacus disguised the path to his cave by dragging the oxen backwards by their tails. When Heracles awoke, he noticed that some of his cattle were missing. He found the nearest cave, but the only animal tracks he saw led away from the cave rather than into it. However, as he moved off with his cattle they mooed, and to his surprise, Heracles heard a response from inside the cave.

Heracles then took his great club and headed for the cave. Cacus, seeing him approach, lowered a gigantic rock into the doorway, sealing himself and the stolen cattle within the cave. Three times Heracles climbed above and around the cave, trying to find a way to reach the giant. Finally, he set his weight against a large rock that was part of the roof of the cave and, with all of his might, pushed it upon its side. As the rock moved toward the earth, the murky interior of Cacus' den was revealed.

Gazing down upon the roaring, fire-spewing giant, Heracles saw pale, decaying heads of men nailed to the cave's walls and smelled the foul odor of blood. First he hurled huge rocks and tree trunks upon Cacus. Then, undaunted by the clouds of black smoke that issued forth from the depths below, he jumped into the cave, threw his arm around the giant's throat, and squeezed with all his strength. When he had permanently extinguished Cacus' fires, and the giant lay dead upon the floor, Heracles moved the stone from the doorway. He dragged the giant out by his feet, led forth the cattle, and went on his way.

Eight years had now passed since Heracles had begun his labors. For his eleventh labor, Eurystheus commanded Heracles to collect the golden apples of the Hesperides, daughters of the Titan Atlas, who held the sky upon his shoulders. Gaea had given the apple trees to Hera as a wedding gift, and they were guarded by a hundred-headed, immortal dragon who spoke in many different voices.

In order to locate the garden, Heracles had to consult Nereus, the old man of the sea. When Heracles found him along the shore and grabbed him, the sea god tried to frighten Heracles away by turning himself into a series of fearful sights. He became a raging fire, a roaring lion, a slithering snake, and a torrent of water, but through every change in appearance, Heracles held on to the figure beneath the apparition. In the end, Nereus gave up and gave Heracles the directions he needed.

On his way to the garden, Heracles passed through Libya, which was ruled by a giant son of Gaea (Earth) named Antaeus. Antaeus was an unusually strong and skillful wrestler and challenged every stranger to a wrestling match. Antaeus inevitably won and put the loser to death. Then he hung the head of his latest victim next to his other trophies on the temple of Poseidon.

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immediately became much stronger. Heracles realized that, in order to win this contest, he would have to prevent Antaeus' mother from renewing her son's strength. Therefore, Heracles hugged Antaeus and, using his deathly grip and all his might, he lifted the giant into the air and held him there, strangling, until he died. Then Heracles killed all the wild beasts in the country, enabling farmers to plant olive orchards and vineyards.

Heracles continued his journey, which took him to the Caucasus. There he found the Titan Prometheus nailed to the mountain and helpless as Zeus' eagle tore out his liver. Heracles raised his giant bow and killed the bird; then he freed Prometheus. In return, Prometheus advised Heracles that he should find Atlas and take the sky upon his own shoulders, sending Atlas for the golden apples instead of attempting to deal with the dragon and gather them himself.

Heracles followed Prometheus' advice. Atlas returned with the apples but announced that he was tired of holding the sky upon his shoulders and that he would take the apples to King Eurystheus himself. Heracles immediately agreed to take over Atlas' task, but craftily asked Atlas to hold the sky temporarily while he put a pad upon his head to make the weight more tolerable. Atlas helpfully put the apples upon the ground and accepted the sky. Heracles quickly picked up the apples and left the gigantic Titan with his awesome burden.

For his twelfth and final labor, Eurystheus commanded Heracles to enter the Underworld and return with Cerberus, the monstrous, three-headed dog that guarded the entrance to the dread kingdom of Hades. Heracles was accompanied by Hermes, the wayfinder, who leads the shades of the dead down to the Underworld.

Heracles approached Hades and asked his permission to take Cerberus to King Eurystheus. The lord of the dead agreed on the condition that Heracles must capture the monstrous hound without using any weapon. Hades' command challenged Heracles because, in addition to its three heads, Cerberus had a back covered with snakes and the tail of a dragon. Heracles covered himself with his protective lion skin, embraced the three-headed monster, and never let go. He carried the hound up to Tiryns, showed the monster to Eurystheus, and then returned it to Hades.

Heracles continued to have numerous adventures after he had completed his labors. Many years later, Heracles' wife, jealous that he might love another woman, sent her husband the gift of a tunic that had been soaked in the blood of the hydra. An enemy of Heracles' had treacherously led her to believe that the tunic would cause Heracles to remain in love with her.

When Heracles put the tunic on, the heat of his body activated the poison, causing the tunic to stick to his skin and burn it. In agony, he immediately tore off the tunic, and with it his skin. Only death could relieve his misery, so he built a funeral pyre and lay down upon it. However, no one he asked was willing to put a torch to it and kill him. Finally, Philoctetes happened to pass by, and when he saw Heracles in such excruciating

pain, he agreed to light the pyre. As a reward, Heracles gave Philoctetes his great bow and arrows, which the young man, in later years, took to Troy.

Just as the burning torch touched the wood of the funeral pyre, a bolt of lightning flashed in the clear sky and struck the pyre. A cloud immediately descended into the roaring mass of flames, enveloped Heracles, and carried him up to Mount Olympus. After the fire had consumed the entire pyre, not even Heracles' bones remained among the ashes. Zeus had kept his promise; Heracles had become immortal.

GREECE: The Epic Hero The *Iliad* of Homer

Historical Background

The story of the *Iliad* begins in Greece during the Bronze or Mycenaean Age.

As early as about 2600 B.C., Greek-speaking tribes from the north invaded the area of northern Greece known as Macedonia. Between 1900 B.C. and 1600 B.C. the descendants of these peoples moved southward to inhabit the rest of Greece. The golden age of their civilization occurred between 1450 B.C., when they conquered the island of Crete and adopted much of the technology and art of that advanced society, and about 1200 B.C., when their palace-centers were sacked in civil wars.

Our knowledge of the Mycenaean civilization in Greece is based primarily upon what archaeologists have been able to discover. Fortunately, they have located and studied the ruins of a number of important sites in Greece as well as Troy (across the Aegean Sea on the coast of what is now Turkey, and the actual site of the battles Homer describes in the *Iliad*). The material available to archaeologists is very limited, due to the ravages of weather, fire, theft, and the inability of most substances to withstand the passage of 3,000 years. The materials that have survived include decorated objects—such as jewelry, pottery, and metal containers—and an assortment of war gear—shields, helmets, and various kinds of weapons. In addition, archaeologists have found a large number of clay tablets, inscribed with a language called Linear B, which they can read.

The Mycenaean civilization in full bloom far surpassed in complexity and wealth many of the Greek civilizations that followed it, including Homer's age. The Mycenaeans were an aggressive people who enjoyed fighting, hunting, and athletic contests. Except for the Peloponnese, their land was mountainous and their soil rocky and dry. Therefore, they took to the sea and became fearsome raiders of other communities. In this way they acquired extraordinary wealth. They lived and died with weapons by their sides; fortunately for archaeologists, they buried their dead in tombs along with the war